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ABSTRACT

The development of public relations as an industry is traced in this document, and the need for high standards to be set and maintained is stressed. Ways to improve personal and professional standards in the public relations field include continuous reading and study on the subject, establishing a code of ethics for the profession, and taking pride in personal performance. (RI)

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"PROFIT BEGINS WITH P R"
Annual Conference
July 30, 1976

--- Keynote Address ---

"THE NEED FOR IMPROVED STANDARDS IN PROFESSIONAL PR"

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One hundred years ago, March 10, 1876, to be exact, Alexander Graham Bell picked up his telephone and said: "Mr. Watson, Come here, I want to see you." That primitive, crackling, wired box opened up a whole new spectrum to the world's communicators...amateurs and professionals alike. For the first time, we had immediate, 2-way communications beyond the back fences, to the regions, the nation, and the world. Next came the marconi wireless...and radio...then television in 1927. Jet planes. Communications satellites. Men walking on the moon just seven years ago, and ten days ago...we, with our tax dollars, landed the "Viking" on Mars.

So much communications hardware in the last hundred years has caused the world to grow smaller, complex, argumentative, overcrowded, confused, mistrusting, afraid. We've invented the computers and the sensitive social sciences processes to measure attitudes and better understand ourselves and our neighbors. And now, with computers at newspapers, we can provide scanner-ready copy in the furtherance of our efforts to interpret our employers' messages in the public interest. In Miami, the Herald, News, Coral Gables Times-Guide and North Dade Journal have converted to the computers, and our office, in an effort to keep pace in the hopes of improving both our speed and effectiveness, has released its first scanner-ready copy to the Miami Herald, which appeared verbatim on Monday.

One hundred years ago, there were a handful of men, most of them newspaper trained, who started to revolutionize the field of public relations...pushing an age of press agentry and "public-be-damned" attitudes toward today, 1976, the start of the third century, where we stand as an army of trained, practiced communicators. It's estimated that we number conservatively 100,000, and I'm recognizing in my figure only those whom we can identify spend fifty per cent or more of their time in the daily pursuit of public relations. This excludes press agents.

Many have media backgrounds, but a surging number of us bring educational and training experiences in the fields of the social sciences, humanities, political science, market research, commerce, and law. Because of the complexities of this world, we are rapidly developing specialties in government, corporate public relations, banking, education, finance, health care, trade associations, transportation, utilities. We wear several hats, you and I. Depending on the season and the needs of our employers and clients, we are lobbyists, market researchers, analysts, writers, special events programmers, public speakers, publicists, booking agents, photographers, artists... problem solvers.

Continually, we must retrain and prepare ourselves for today's challenges and tomorrow's...but how? That, I believe is the question posed by the speech topic handed me by Jim Turner of Tampa Electric Company. On the radio the other day, I heard that everything the sciertists ever dreamed of twenty years ago has been accomplished, or surpassed. We communicator/problem solvers have an awesome responsibility and task to perform, sitting as we do, as responsible members, with America's public and private-sector management teams.

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To further set the stage, permit me a longer glance backward into the art of communicating. Indeed this was art in the Stone Age as man etched his impressions on the walls of caves. Man's need to earn popular approval and support showed in Pharoah's day. The literature and works of art of that ancient Egyptian era, historians say, is evidence of a need to publicize and gain public favor.

The early Romans paid tribute to the forces of public opinion with the expression Vox Populi, Vox Dei. "The voice of the people is the voice of God."

Two hundred years ago, during our American revolution, men like Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin wrote pamphlets, contributed articles to the press of the day, made speeches and instigated word-of-mouth campaigns to stir up popular support for what was, at least at the outset, not a popular cause.

All of us are familar with the accounts and the struggles of our 19th century forerunners to influence a favorable public opinion and to define and evolve a concept of planned public relations. In the muckrakers era of 1906, Ivy Lee, New York Times and New York Evening Journal reporter, turned press agent, told business tycoons that "The public should be informed. It should be given the truth."

Lee's advice didn't convert us overnight. But World War II did. It demanded spectacular performances by American business and industry. Publicity imperatives became a factor in government, too...and today, on the heels of the Watergate, we are engaged in the most active of campaigns, certainly in Florida, to make government open, responsive, accessible...to protect the people's right to know, to uphold government's obligation to tell and to promote meaningful citizens' involvement in the decision-making process affecting public policy.

So much for today's history lesson. Have you see the July issue of the Smithsonian? I commend it to your reading. The Smithsonian secretary, S. Dillon Ripley, writes: "Americans enjoy being cynical, especially about government, and they tend to assume, sometimes with an undercurrent of piousness, that corruption - at least for some - is here to stay. But Americans have enormous resilience. When one considers the state of our country - 200 nay 100 years ago, the distance that we have traversed is stupendous. Poverty, disease, lack of communication and transportation - today, compared with the past, we are at a level of security and technological knowledge never before equaled."

Ripley concludes saying: "There is a mood afoot in this nation today for a return to friendship, to confidence and to optimism for the future."

Norman Macrae, in an article in the same issue on "Ways Americans Can Still Grow," points out: "The free industrial countries pick the purveyors of about three-fifths of our goods and services (detergents, for example) through competitive consumer choice, and we pick the purveyors of the often most essential other two-fifths of our services and goods (such as city management) through casting votes." He observes that the mechanisms for picking the purveyors for detergents is working far better than the processes for picking presidents and mayors. The public relations experts surrounding the Carter camp may help to right some of this criticism.

Jimmy Carter came out of the South to tell middle America and to sell middle America on the idea of a new breed of politician.

As my favorite columnist in the Miami News wrote the other day, George Washington Carver made more than 300 products from the lowly peanut and Jimmy Carter found how to market them all.

But Carter has shown through his professionalism how a shrewd sense of timing could strike the national mood...he sensed and adapted modern communications techniques to political simplicity at a time when the national mood was harshly disturbed.

He had drafted a public relations program that displayed politics of the highest skill...that touched every sense of the country...that exploited modern technology... and enabled him to express his own self-confidence. And that's what public relations is all about.

Rebuilding the public confidence in business as a good investment...in government as a faithful and relevant democratic system are the key challenges of public relations as we stand today in the doorway to the third century.

Many of you are members of the Public Relations Society of America. You are therefore familar with, and subscribe to the Code of Ethics and its declaration of principles, that: "Members of PRSA acknowledge and publicly declare that the public relations profession, in serving the legitimate interests of clients or employers, is dedicated fundamentally to the goals of better mutual understanding and cooperation among the diverse individuals, groups, institutions, and elements of our modern society."

The "public" in public relations sharpens our senses to the needs, desires, expectations and fair demands of those whom we identify are the potential users of our companies' services. Honest, truthful representation of our goods and services in the marketplace...concern and respect for the conservation of the world's God-given natural resources...service satisfaction, the philosophy of the "Baker's Dozen,"... these values are paramount today. The "public" in public relations makes many of us realize, at least sometimes, that our prime responsibility is to the public, and we serve this best as we strive to do our full share of maintaining our companies' highest possible positions within their industries.

Edward Pendray emphasized the "people" factor, speaking at a PRSA conference in Chicago in 1968, when he said: "Our profession, as the art and science of dealing with people, will in the future have no lack of raw material for its practice. There will be plenty of people. There will also be an unparalleled need for the skills, knowledge and perceptions of qualified public relations practitioners."

With all the image problems and misunderstandings and low levels of credibility our nation faces today, we in public relations require the mental equipment to effectively interpret the publics to our management, interpret management to the publics, and suggest wise courses of action. Historically, business has supplied society with the goods and services it needs. Today, we recognize that society is placing a greater emphasis on human values for the individual and community.

If we accept Pendray's emphasis on the "people" factor, then we can agree that the public relations professional must deal with the dynamics of personal relationships... which reminds me of what I say to our county line staff in seminars on public relations and public service...that the best public relations is personal relations... taking the time and caring enough to listen, to serve, and follow through. This era of consumerism is showing us a clear evidence that the people prefer to deal with companies they know, can understand and trust. I interpret this to mean that people like companies that are communicative and are honest. Many of you must be acquainted with Brandon Davis, the Director of Public Relations for the First National Bank of Memphis. In a recent letter to the members of the PRSA Board, he expressed his fear over "our paranoia to define our profession. Indeed public relations seems more fittingly described by personality than by practice," Davis wrote. He recited what happened to a friend attending the PRSA conference in Bal Harbor-Miami almost two years ago. In the hotel lobby, the friend was approached by a shapely young professional who was seeking to negotiate a relationship. When nothing could be negotiated, the professional offered her calling card that bore the designation: "Public Relations." Davis says he's not interested in beginning a special section in PRSA called the "Hookers Section," but I think he is suggesting that we better worry about the group of professionals, so-called, whose credentials are below par, who operate out of their hip pockets, whose careers are more akin to real estate sales and ballroom dancing lessons, who call themselves public relations people. If we can officially adopt the function title "public relations" to be used only by those having official responsibility for the total communications function, we will be on our way toward professionalism. We who do qualify have a responsibility through our professional associations to share our experience and knowledge, at workhops such as this so those legitimate, part-time, para-professionals who may not be eligible for membership in our associations can be helped to improve their skills and become more proficient in the practice of PR.

I'm reminded at this point of a provocative, delightful little fable---it goes like this: An old Russian peasant was going along the road one very cold morning, when he saw a bird laying on the ground. At first, he thought it was dead, but when he picked it up, he felt a faint heartbeat.

He was about to throw it away, when he chanced upon a cow that had just dropped a large, moist pie. The peasant buried the bird in the pie up to its little beak and went on his way. After a time, the hot pie did its work and the bird revived.

When it revived, it began to sing. A wolf heard it singing, pulled it out and ate it.

This is the end of the story, but remember -- most Russian stories have a moral. This one, in fact, has three.

First: Whoever puts you in it is not necessarily your enemy.

Second: Whoever takes you out of it is not necessarily your friend.

Third: If you are up to your neck in it, don't sing!

It matters little to the newspaper editor whether the person carrying in the press release spends 100 per cent or 10 per cent of his time in the practice of public relations. All he knows is that the service is done well, or poorly. The press release is relevant and well written, or poor, and that reflects greatly on all of us. Therefore, we can directly affect an improvement in the standards of our practice by first participating fully in those regional, state and national public relations associations that promote professional development through new learning experiences and that speak for public relations, as a whole, and foster codes of ethical conduct within the profession.

There's often discussion, even debate, at meetings such as this as to whether we are professionals or craftsmen. Certainly, in 1976, the evidence is weighing more heavily in favor of the professional status. Mainly it's an attitude, a drive on our individual parts to partake of all that is available to promote this expertise. An accepted body of knowledge...a reasonably standardized, and generally accepted course of study is a mark of professionalism in the fields of medicine, law, architecture, education. We have that body of knowledge now in public relations, and it is ever expanding.

The first single course offering was made in 1923 at New York University. By 1970, 84 major programs existed, and more than 300 schools provided at least a sequence. Beginning last year, in 1975, eight schools were offering graduate degree programs. Twelve more were offering baccalaureate degrees. The American Council on Education for Journalism is the official accrediting body for coursework provided in public relations in our nation's schools of journalism. By 1968, it had accredited 11 colleges and universities, including the University of Florida and University of Georgia. The others are the Universities of Boston, Maryland, Oregon, Texas, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Ohio University, Ohio State University, and the University of Southern California.

Today, 62 colleges in 30 states, and in all the southeastern states, except North Carolina, have Public Relations Society of America student chapters, PRSSA, with 1,800 members.

Schools of business and public administration are adding one or more courses in public relations to their curriculums, teaching the future chief executive officers to be more aware of the role of PR in the management function.

By our continuous reading and study, we can improve our personal status. We can benefit ourselves and our profession by participating as instructors and guest lecturers on the campuses, by supplying case studies to the libraries, by donating magazines and books and...by offering internships in our organizations.

In early 1965, after three years of preparation, PRSA disclosed plans for an accreditation program designed to: (quote) "Raise professional standards and improve the practice of public relations." This program provides special learning benefits for those of us who are in our forties, or older, who missed the college theory. To date, 2,673 PRSA members, by oral and written examination, have become accreditated... unfortunately, less than one-third. The South Florida Chapter of PRSA provided the first examination program in Florida, I believe, in 1969. Six of us were candidates,

and five passed. In the spring of this year, there were 149 candidates nationwide. The failure rate was approximately 28 per cent. Today, prospective members in PRSA may become active only through accreditation. Though there are long debates at the Assembly about whether to impose a time limit on the associate status, there still is no approved formula for forcing the accreditation at a time certain in one's career.

Now, the Florida Public Relations Association has a certification program, and in the last year, FPRA & PRSA, together with the Canadian Public Relations Society and International PR Association have formed the International Accreditation Council which is designed to set minimum, professional standards, and to serve as a watch dog over accreditating programs, sponsored worldwide. An invitation to join IAC has been extended to the Canadian Institute of Association Executives. The French Public Relations Society has indicated that it wants to hold provisional member status as they are in the process of establishing an accreditation program. The National School Public Relations Association is also interested in joining the international accreditation council. The next meeting of the IAC is scheduled in Boston, August 14.

A Code of Ethics is another mark of the professional. The PRSA Code is being closely scrutinized and compared with the codes of Sigma Delta Chi, the Associated Press Managing Editors and others to see if it needs stiffening. A code, of course, must be strictly and fairly enforced, and strong committees and procedures must be formulated to insure that reputations are protected until guilt or innocence is established.

A new development in the Society which your chairman, Jim Turner has asked me to speak about today is the formation of the Sections in PRSA. I'm dubbed the "Godmother of the Sections" as the PRSA President, last year, Jim Fox, asked me to serve as the chairman of the sub-committee to establish them. We recognize that many of us are gravitating from a generalist approach into specialties. To more fully serve the broad range of members' needs in the 7,500-member Society, and help members in the development of their particular areas of professional interest, we - last year - polled the membership and received sufficient interest to expand the Sections from three to nine. PRSA already had the Counselors, Government, and Association Sections. Now, there have been added the Corporate, Financial Institutions, Health Care, Educational Institutions, Public Utilities and Investor Relations Sections. Section members receive newsletters three times a year; they are provided special workshops at the annual conference; and special professional interest materials are being developed for use at the local chapter levels. This is the first year of the expanded program, and 57 per cent of Society members have found "homes" and additional professional development opportunities with no increase in dues.

The Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education, an independent, non-profit organization, established by PRSA in 1956, is another aid to improved standards. Headed by academicians and the deans of our business, the Foundation sponsors basic study in the general field of public relations, and publishes a review three times a year.

We also raise our professional standards by our pride in our performance. Dr. Carl Hawver in 1974 in Bal Harbor said: "A profession may well be identified by the

function it fulfills, but the professional is identified by how well he performs that function. It is the pride in a superior performance that separates the professional from the drudge."

So, there we have it.. seven methods by which we can continually improve the standards in professional PR...1. By subscribing to a Code of Ethics, 2. By belonging to and participating in associations that promote professional development activities, 3. By utilizing the accepted body of knowledge, 4. By participating in an encouraging the training of the people who'll be taking our place in the future, 5. By accepting the challenge of the accreditation examination and by using the earned designation following our name, 6. By fostering research and study in our field, and 7. By showing pride in our daily performance.

Ivy Lee described himself as a "physician to corporate bodies." A former employer of mine, Bob Venn, considered himself an "architect of human endeavor." I see ours as an even higher calling...God's messengers in the marketplace. We, the communicators, interpreters, are the catalysts, the pursuers of understanding, trust, compassion and fair play in the marketplact.

It seems to me that the position description for public relations director clearly spells out the responsibility for promoting the "Golden Rule." Our managements, usually, will listen to us when we propose public service programs that can benefit our communities and our customers and alleviate pain in the neighborhoods. To be guided on the right course, we must pay close attention to the drummer's beat... and be careful that we are listening to the <u>right</u> drummer's beat. Our program delivery is with people. We are the stewards of the people's trust. More than ever, I believe, the business community is looking for the best trained, most principled professionals to manage the public relations function. And I also believe that our customers are anxious to believe in our messages again.